

Concerning Closed Captioning Quality, Quantity, and Accuracy

I am an assistant professor of Spanish and am hearing, but my wife is deaf. We have the captions turned on on our television all the time and rarely watch any program that is not captioned. The quantity of captioning is good at the moment. The number of programs with closed captions has been steadily increasing over the past seven years (since I started watching captions). But, the accuracy is terrible and seems to be getting worse. At first I thought that live programs had more errors in the captions because of the live, real-time captioning required for live shows. Conversely, pre-recorded programs and movies had better captions because the captions can be added in the post-production process and the captioner has the needed time to review any sentences that he or she doesn't understand clearly, also the whole program can be viewed to edit and correct captions as part of post-production preparations for release. However, in the past six months or so, I have noticed terrible errors in pre-recorded programs, even in movies. In some shows there are as many errors as in live programming, even to the point of changing the meaning of the sentence or changing the plot of the story. I now believe that too little attention is paid to the accuracy of the captions. It is even evident that the writers and directors of the shows have not seen what their programs look like to the deaf world. In a live show it is understandable for something like "presidential" to be rendered "press identical"... the deaf viewer might figure out what it was supposed to say, or might not never know the difference... but a hearing person watching the captions and listening at the same time would be surprised at the errors. However, such errors should not be accepted in programs with weeks, or even months, of lag time between production and broadcast!